



## Conference Paper

# The Influence of Postcolonial Studies on the Transformation of Methodology in Philosophy and Cultural Theory

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**Abstract**

The article describes the methodological shifts in the theory and philosophy of culture brought about by the influence of the postcolonial studies. The main focus is on the problems arising in the discursive representation of cultures.

**Keywords:** culture, philosophy of culture, postcolonial studies, methodology, discourse.

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## 1. Introduction

Postcolonial studies emerged as a critical theory focusing on the dynamics of power and domination in culture. It has influenced the methodology of philosophy and cultural theory. The researchers deconstruct the colonialism and its power images and try to recreate an authentic image of the subjugated culture or social group.

Postcolonial discourse has facilitated the twin processes of accentuating and dissolving boundaries between cultures, races and gender behavior models. This has necessarily put in sharp relief the issue of identity and the quest for identity self-awareness. Accentuation of cultural boundaries unfolds through the focus on their uniqueness and difference. However, this process is performed in such a way as to avoid judgmental comparisons between cultures. Such an approach equalizes cultures, thus making it impossible the kind of value hierarchy discourse that used to be prevalent in philosophy and cultural theory. This context lends a different angle to a traditional culturological respect to the Other and to the 'alien' cultures. A subjugated culture receives a right to represent its own identity and to have its value system recognized.

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## 2. Cultural Value System in Postcolonial Discourse

Cultural value system presupposes hierarchy and the existence of normative behavior. Identification with a sociocultural community is performed by mirroring its behavioral models and thought systems. However, any insistence on uniqueness and superiority of any particular value system may be interpreted as a drive to suppress other cultures and impose on them a dominant order. Any talk about cultural superiority assumes that this particular culture tries to downplay the issue of dominance. Isn't this facilitating the erasure of cultural boundaries? Or, maybe, it accentuates even further the existence of unsurmountable boundaries between cultures? These are highly contentious questions.

Postcolonial discourse deals with the culture's specific anthropological parameters based on obvious differences between human beings: age, race, gender. Polygenists' and monogenists' discussions about the origins and differences between human races are continued in the discussions of *gender*. Gender used to be considered a fixed characteristic that divided all humanity into the two subgroups. However, gender discourse has changed this paradigm. Gender discourse became a part of the discourse on the origins of species and their equality. The question, whether human races are descendants of different populations or a single species, is directly tied to the discussion on the inequality between species, on power and dominance. What is important is that gender issues were raised primarily in the context of overcoming gender inequalities. Thus, gender discourse became a modification of the discourse on the origins of species.

The notion of differences between genders, with a standard set of attributes ascribed to each gender, is projected onto the cultural sphere. In this context, the voices of provisional 'monogenists', who believe that gender differences are insignificant and do not produce such differing cultural realities as male politics or female writing, get lost in the general accord existing in gender studies, which separates male and female attributes and projects them onto the male and female cultures. Subsequent development of gender discourse has led to the concept of multiple identities irreducible to male or female genders. The previously fixed rigid social and cultural 'boxes' become fluid; their relativity and conventionality become obvious.

The deconstruction of the concepts of nation, race and local cultural images formed under the influence of the 'metropole' prompts problematization of cultural languages representing cultural ambivalence of interpenetrating 'global' and 'local' discourses. The rising relevance of 'global' and 'local' discourse in current philosophical concepts of

culture is based on the reinterpretation of such foundational categories of philosophy and cultural theory as: 'central' and 'peripheral', 'empire' and 'colony', 'capital' and 'province', 'universal' and 'regional', 'marginal'. 'Global' and 'local', 'dominant' and 'sub-altern' discourses determine each other; being the opposing sides of the same socio-cultural phenomenon, these two discourses produce conditions for the each other's existence. The community's struggle to define its cultural uniqueness within a post-imperial locus is interpreted in post-colonial studies as the struggle for identity that unfolds in the sphere of politics and discourse.

A colony exists at the boundary; it is simultaneously a space and a place of representation of imperial discourse and symbols; however, this representation unfolds within a space and a territory governed by the discourse of the Other, the discourse of the native culture. Border territories not only exist at the physical and geographical boundaries – they exist at the mental and discourse junctions; it is a boundary between different systems, fields of meanings and discourses. In this case, a change of discourses becomes a change of identity.

### 3. Hybrid Cultures and the Cultural Dialogue

Hybrid cultures form at the cultural boundaries absorbing discourses and practices of different cultures – therefore, they are boundary phenomena. M.M.Bakhtin and V.S.Bibler had elaborated the concept of cultural dialogue. Building on Bakhtin's ideas, Bibler wrote that culture is possible only in meeting with another culture [2]. The process of cultural dialogue is interpreted as the process by which a culture develops its own identity. Bakhtin and Bibler believed that this unique identity becomes impossible without such an existence at the boundary between cultures. The boundary between cultures not only separates them, but also creates the space of intersection. According to L.A.Zaks, "borders not only divide, they also unite! They conflate the differences, bundling them together. Borders effectively become the factors of integration, of the systemic development of relationships that are productive = engender new cultural phenomena" [3, p. 20].

Postcolonial studies shift the focus: the boundaries are places where a different hybrid culture is being developed. The border is not only the space where cultures mix and define themselves – it is also a space of a different culture. "Gatherings of exiles and *emigres* and refugees; gathering on the edge of 'foreign' cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gatherings in the ghettos or cafés of city centres; gathering in the half-life,

half-light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another's language; gathering the signs of approval and acceptance, degrees, discourses, disciplines; gathering the memories of underdevelopment, of other worlds lived retroactively." [1, p. 139] Hybrid culture holds the traces of those cultures at whose boundaries it emerged; its identity is hidden; it is a symbiosis of alien meanings. In the process of adopting to a dominant culture, hybrid culture was obliged to adjust – therefore, even an identity narrative represents the struggle and the interpenetration of identities.

The existing polyvariability of discourses and narratives produces alternative interpretative schemes describing the same historical facts or events. According to the postcolonial studies, these narratives have equal value. However, we would like to question this idea. The existence of multiple narratives describing the same event means the refusal to verify these narratives, because the researcher cannot be objective towards them (no matter how hard he or she tries). The researcher herself possesses a certain identity that compels her to use a certain discourse and, therefore, a certain narrative.

Is it possible to take the 'boundary' non-discourse position, or a polydiscourse position, regarding the narrative? Postcolonial studies presume the attitude of a subject/critic positioned simultaneously outside and above the discourses. Such a research position presupposes either the development of a metadiscourse (in which case we may deal with the levelling of the 'otherness' of each discourse, position or culture), or the skill in switching between discourses (which is also problematic, since this strategy assumes that the translation of categories and value systems of different cultures is impossible). Thus, the position of subject/critic becomes questionable in itself, because the critic and his/her research apparatus were formed under the influence of either dominant or colonized culture.

Gayatri Spivak notes [4] that the subalterns and their interests cannot be represented by the official institutions, since these institutions don't use the language of subalterns, but rather construct their own language and defend their own interests. How and in what practices the members of the colonized culture can represent their identity? Is it true that the researcher or critic should belong to the colonized culture in order to have a right to speak on behalf of this culture? The discourses compacted together within one utterance show how the global multicultural trend penetrates the local cultures.

## 4. Preliminary Conclusions

The influence of postcolonial studies led to the revision of such concepts and ideas as identity, nation, cultural dialogue, cultural boundaries, the Other, hybrid cultures. The new research strategies are born at the junctures between postcolonial studies and critical studies (for example, feminism and cultural studies). These strategies – such as postcolonial feminism (or the ‘feminism of color’ that opposes the Western feminism) – foreground the issues of domination and oppression, hegemony and mimicry. Postcolonial discourse transcends the questions of the relationships between East and West, colonies and empires, and exerts a profound influence on different research programs.

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